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ABSTRACT

This digest describes three teacher education program models designed to concentrate on: (1) a philosophy of middle school education; (2) an understanding of the unique psychological, social, and intellectual needs peculiar to the 10- to 14-year-old student; (3) an ability to increase student motivation; and (4) a command of subject area. The first program, Teaching Early Adolescents in Middle Schools (TEAMS), is offered at Ohio State University. The five quarter program enables students to engage in classroom observation, planning and teaching, reflection seminars, study of child development, classroom management, and teaching strategies. The Early Adolescent Block Program, offered at St. Cloud State University (Minnesota), is based on state certification requirements. Students receive an overview of early adolescent education, observe in cooperating schools, and attend seminars where they reflect on experiences. The final program is offered at North Carolina State University (Raleigh). A key course in this program, Teaching in the Middle Years, serves as a model for a good middle school classroom. The course uses many of the same methods that are successful in teaching young adolescents and engages the teacher education students in the types of activities they will be using in their middle school classes. (LL)

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MODEL PROGRAMS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER PREPARATION

by

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Model Programs for Middle School Teacher Preparation

Anne Marie Harnett

Introduction

Studies on the developmental characteristics and educational needs of young adolescents (aged 10-14) indicate the need for specialized programs to prepare teachers for this age group. Researchers and practitioners alike say it is essential to develop a cadre of teachers grounded in the philosophy of middle school education; knowledgeable about the psychological, social, and intellectual development of early adolescents; and possessing the practical skills to work with early adolescents (Silverman, 1990).

According to a national survey (Epstein & MacIver, 1990), middle grades principals want their teachers to have command of their subject area, be able to increase student motivation, and to understand early adolescence. Literature reviews, as well as surveys of teachers in grades 6-8, lead to similar conclusions. To achieve such goals, preservice teacher education programs must provide experiences in middle school settings and courses that develop an understanding of the early adolescent's unique needs.

A survey (McEwin & Alexander, 1987) of American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education member institutions found that only 33% of the 504 respondents had any kind of specialized program for middle-level teacher preparation. In most instances, present programs or those planned were tied to state certification requirements. The three programs described below are examples of concentrations in middle-level preparation that involve several required courses or credits.

Program Models

Teaching Early Adolescents in Middle Schools

Teaching Early Adolescents in Middle Schools (TEAMS) (Cunningham & Shillington, 1989) is a collaborative program involving middle-level practitioners, teacher educators at the Ohio State University, and preservice teachers who have had previous leadership experience with early adolescents and are committed to middle-level education. The program is a 5-quarter, one-half day, teacher training program in which 4-member preservice student teacher cohort groups are formed on the basis of personal choice and personality assessment. These students remain together for the first two quarters and are the instructional context for most field and course requirements.

Team members observe each other and engage in group process and small group reflection discussions. These activities give the members first-hand experience in using and valuing feedback and other group process skills they will need to assist early adolescents in the process of self-identification.

During all five quarters, the interaction of theory and action is prominent. First-quarter TEAMS students engage in limited observation of classrooms and interdisciplinary team (IDT) settings, planning and teaching episodes, reflection seminars, and tasks concerned with individual child development and team inquiry.

During the second and third quarters, students learn classroom management and teaching strategies in a second field site. They observe school-based IDT members model math, science, language arts, and social studies teaching methods which they have studied in their university courses. Field-based mentors guide TEAMS members as they apply instructional strategies and methods.

Student teaching is done during the fourth quarter. During the fifth quarter, students return to campus for seminars devoted to processing and reflecting on teaching experiences, building on strengths, and collectively reinforcing areas that need further development.

Because mentoring is an important part of beginning teacher induction, the organizers of the TEAM program decided that mentoring should begin in the preservice stage. They asked principals in each participating middle school to select entire IDTs to act as mentors for the student teachers. These teams plan and supervise experiences to socialize preservice teachers into middle school teachers' multifaceted roles: encouraging student teams to observe and participate in IDT decision making for diagnosis of pupil learning needs, curriculum/instructional planning, parent/community interactions, and completion of evaluation forms for individual and team performance.

Early Adolescent Block Program

Another collaborative middle school teacher education program is the Early Adolescent Block Program offered through St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota (Putbrese, 1984). The Block Program is 19 quarter credits of course offerings consisting of components required by the Minnesota Board of Education for certification of middle school teachers. Students who have completed the introduction to either elementary or secondary education can be accepted into the Block Program.

During the initial days of the program, students remain on campus for an overview of early adolescent education, developmental characteristics, appropriate programming for middle-level education, and preparation for the field-experience component. For the remainder of the quarter, students spend

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four days each week in a cooperating middle school and the fifth day on campus for a seminar.

Throughout the entire quarter the student remains with the first cooperating teacher for advisor/advisee purposes and leisure reading. The advantage of this arrangement is that it affords the student teacher the opportunity to bond with one group of students and to observe the same students over a longer period of time.

In an effort to afford students exposure to several fields of study, this program also requires each student to have 10-day field experiences in four different curricular areas. In each 10-day segment, the type of experience and level of involvement depends on the extent to which the cooperating teacher is willing to involve the student teacher and on the student teacher's feelings of competence in the subject area. Generally, students have the opportunity to become involved in small group and individual instruction; many have the opportunity to prepare and teach a class. They live the life of the teacher with all its attendant tasks.

During the seminar, the Block students learn about the complexities involved in middle school education through reflection on their experiences, and through instruction and discussion on such topics as interdisciplinary teams, advisor/advisee programs, learning styles, and early adolescent development. In addition to the seminar, the students attend a regional or national middle school conference.

The Block activities replace formal college classes. All Block activities are carefully monitored by the university professor and cooperating middle school faculty. Students receive feedback from university professors on a regular basis, and at the end of each 10-day assignment, they receive a written evaluation from the cooperating teacher describing both strengths and weaknesses.

As a result of the Block program, students are able to make a conscious decision about applying for licensure as a middle school teacher. Such early decision making by the student diminishes the possibility of frustrating experiences upon securing a teaching position.

North Carolina State University Program

North Carolina State University (Raleigh) offers a middle years education degree program which includes eight courses specifically designed for the middle years and prepares students to teach in two fields: language arts/social studies or math/science. A key course in the program is "Teaching in the Middle Years," usually taken in the junior year and prior to student teaching (Arnold, 1988).

The course serves as a model for a good middle school classroom, using many of the same methods that are successful in teaching young adolescents and engaging the teacher education students in the types of activities they will be using in their middle school classes. The professor encourages students to become change agents by implementing new ideas in helping to create "real middle schools" and not just renamed junior high schools.

It has been found that for both undergraduate and middle school students, a focus on values encourages critical thinking, personal involvement, and dialogue. Therefore, the prospective teachers engage in discussions about the underlying assumptions and values of the course material. The professor and students engage in collaborative work and interdisciplinary inquiry while building a sense of community. The course covers four basic components of middle years education: early adolescent development, curriculum, teaching/learning methodology, and school organization.

Conclusion

Much work is still to be done in research on middle-level teacher preparation and on the kinds of curricula and programs that will best prepare prospective teachers of early adolescents. The programs summarized point up both the need for more middle-level teacher education programs and the direction these programs might take.

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References identified with an EJ or ED number are in the ERIC database. Journal articles (EJ) should be available at most research libraries; documents (ED) are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 700 locations or can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service: (800) 443-3742. For more information contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036-1186, (202) 293-2450; or (800) USE-ERIC.

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